

Churchill, Sir Winston (Picture)



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**Attlee, Clement, 1st Earl Attlee**

Clement Richard Attlee, b. Jan. 3, 1883, d. Oct. 8, 1967, was prime minister of Great Britain's first majority Labour government. Of middle-class origin, he was educated at Oxford. After experience as a social worker, he joined (1907) the Fabian Society and was converted to socialism.

Attlee served as an officer in World War I and then was elected (1919) mayor of Stepney, a London working-class borough. Entering the House of Commons in 1922, he became a minister in the minority Labour cabinet of 1929-31 and served as a member of the Simon Commission on Indian government in 1930. He refused to follow Ramsay MACDONALD into the National government in 1931. In 1935 he became the Labour party's leader.

A prewar critic of Conservative foreign and defense policies, Attlee held high office in Winston Churchill's wartime coalition of 1940-45. Following Labour's landslide electoral victory in 1945, he headed the cabinet that created Britain's WELFARE STATE. It nationalized major public utilities and several industries, including coal mining; instituted free medical and hospital care; and established or improved numerous relief programs for the underprivileged. The Attlee cabinet was responsible for the granting (1947) of independence to India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Burma, as well as Britain's charter membership in NATO and alignment with the United States against the Communist powers in the Korean War and the cold war.

Financial and economic problems, especially a trade deficit, forced the Attlee government to resort to austerity measures, including food and fuel rationing and devaluation of the pound. Returned to power by a diminished majority in the 1950 elections, Labour lost a second election to the Conservatives in 1951. Upon retiring from the party leadership in 1955, Attlee was awarded a peerage.

Don M. Cregier

Bibliography: Attlee, Clement R., *As It Happened* (1954); Williams, Francis, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (1961).

Iron Curtain

(946)

The Iron Curtain is a phrase applied after World War II to the economic, social, and military barriers created against the West by the USSR and the Communist countries of Eastern Europe. The phrase first received wide currency when Winston CHURCHILL said (Mar. 5, 1946), in a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Mo., "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent." The metaphor remained valid until the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe beginning in 1989.